

VZCZCXRO3287  
RR RUEHDA  
DE RUEHAK #5669/01 2711328  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 281328Z SEP 06  
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9053  
INFO RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1374  
RUEHDA/AMCONSUL ADANA 1158

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 005669

SIPDIS

EUR/PPD: CFITZGERALD, INFO EUR/UBI, ECA

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [KISL](#) [SCUL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: Turkish Culture Wars Heat Up

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Starting with a front page article in the liberal newspaper "Radikal", secular media outlets in Turkey raised alarms over a set of translated children's classics that allegedly feature "Islamist influence". The works were approved by the Ministry of Education, which prompted editorials and stories about creeping Islamism in Turkish primary education. The media storm over these books - mostly accurate translations coming from Islamist-oriented publishing houses -- demonstrated the passions of the continuing "culture war" in Turkey. End Summary.

¶2. (U) In an August 19 front page article, the liberal newspaper "Radikal" drew attention to a new box set of "100 Basic Classics" for children released recently by an Islamist publishing company. The article claimed that the firm, Damla Yayinevi, inserted Islamic and Turkic references into fairy tales and other pieces of classic western literature. Several examples were given in the article, from a religious greeting in an Oscar Wilde novel to a Turkification of Heidi's grandfather's name.

¶3. (U) The book sets were certified by the Ministry of Education, giving schools the ability to purchase them directly. The article noted that since each of the books is under ninety-six pages, they were not required to conform to several standards applied to normal books - for example, volumes of this length in Turkey are not required to list the translator, and there is no requirement for an International Standard Book Numbering (ISBN) code, making them harder to trace back to the original publishing house.

¶4. (U) Following the "Radikal" article, several other secularist newspapers jumped on the bandwagon. On August 20, "Hurriyet" ran an article entitled "Islamic Makeup for 100 Basic Works" which pointed to several instances of Islamic influence in the books' translation.

¶5. (U) "Sabah" newspaper restated the arguments of the previous two articles on August 22, but then went further by tracking down a translator who worked on the set. Ismail Bilgin, a geologist with the Istanbul Municipality who translated "Pinocchio" in his spare time, told the paper, "I used [this language] naturally. Where is the suspicion in that? In a ninety-six page book Allah is mentioned five or six times. It's wrong to focus on that. If there are errors, I will return and correct them."

¶7. (U) On August 30, Education Minister Celik responded to the growing criticism with statements denying that his ministry was attempting any ideological manipulation of the translated texts. Instead, the Minister placed responsibility on the publishers, saying, "These tactless publishing houses will be made to do the right thing." In a speech to teachers, Celik announced that the books sets would be reviewed again by the Ministry's Education and Instruction Commission.

¶8. (SBU) The publishers of these volumes are widely considered to be Islamist. Damla Yayinevi, the main focus of the "Radikal" article, publishes not only secular textbooks for children, but also

volumes such as "Our Prophet's Life" and "Islam and Science". On Damla's website, owner and founder Mehmet Dogru says that his "experiences, education, and exalted Islam" led him to pursue a career in publishing. Nehir Yayinevi is another Islamist publisher singled out by the "Radikal" article. It is more openly Islamist, publishing many books focused on Islam for children, including "I Love Allah" and "The Six Part Islamic Interpretation Set".

¶9. (SBU) In spite of the social leanings of the publishers, however, the charge of deliberate manipulation of these works is debatable. Quick comparisons of the English versions of these works with the examples of "Islamism" cited by the Turkish press shows that the translations are by and large accurate. Since most of the books were written over 100 years ago, they depict the more consciously religious order of the day. In "Heidi", for example, the main character is often heard praying and engaging in religious discussions with her elders. The translation of these books merely puts these passages in context for younger readers used to hearing "Allah" instead of the more secular "Tanri", the religiously neutral term for a deity.

¶10. (SBU) Emin Gurkan, who oversees textbook publishing for the Ministry of Education, told PDOff that he didn't consider this "issue" to be a scandal. He said, "There were over 200 titles authorized for publication by the Ministry of Education, but none are required reading. The Ministry has never checked the translations for accuracy. Mostly they just look to see if the names match." Gurkan stated that the secular media is "cherry picking" books with a more religious bent to begin with, while ignoring several other books in the series about Chinese communism and liberal thought. "The columnists of Turkey have their own view of secularism," he commented, "but that is not necessarily the view of the state. The rules about checking translations for accuracy have slipped somewhat under this government, bt that is probably not a function of ideology"

ANKARA 00005669 002 OF 002

¶11. (SBU) Comment: The recent "battle of the books" reflects ongoing tensions between social and ideological communities and groups in Turkey. "Kadrolasma", or "cadre-ization" is a word that came into vogue in Turkey in the 1970s. It has been used by the secular elite since then to describe in alarming terms the infiltration of government ministries (in particular the Ministry of Education) by ideologues. Charges of "kadrolasma" are a frequent staple of the secular press, often leveled at Islamists, nationalists, and right-wing politicians in general. This latest uproar over translations is yet another iteration of Turkey's "culture war", pitting secular elites bent on preserving the ideological purity of the education system against Islamist influence. End Comment.

WILSON